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Lawrence University

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Lawrence Awarded NEH Challenge Grant to Establish Humanities Institute

Posted on: January 4th, 2012 by Rick Peterson

A new \$2.7 million Lawrence University initiative designed to foster the professional development of faculty members in the humanities and attract recent Ph.D. recipients in the humanities for the Lawrence Fellows Program has received a \$425,000 boost from the National Endowment for the Humanities.



Lawrence was awarded a highly competitive NEH Challenge Grant to support the creation of the Lawrence Humanities Institute and two new positions at Lawrence through a permanent endowment for two Fellows exclusively in the humanities.

To receive the NEH Challenge Grant and fully fund the project, Lawrence will need to raise \$2.275 million in matching funds toward the \$2.7 million project goal by the end of 2016. The college already has received a lead gift of \$1 million for the program from Tom and Julie Hurvis of Glenview, Ill., 1960 and 1961 Lawrence graduates, respectively.

The Lawrence Humanities Institute is an innovative twist on the successful Lawrence Fellows program that will leverage the expertise of talented post-doctoral fellows to create opportunities for sustained professional development for Lawrence faculty. By fostering greater curricular diversity, team teaching, interdisciplinary research collaborations, and incorporation of new ideas and techniques into research programs, the Lawrence Humanities Institute will help keep all participants at the forefront of their fields as scholars and teachers.

Conceived by humanities faculty, the Lawrence Humanities Institute will actively engage five faculty members and two NEH Fellows in the Humanities in year-long, graduate-style seminars on an emerging, rapidly evolving or other timely area of humanistic study under a two-year theme selected by the Institute's director and advisory board. The goal of the seminars is to foster both an individual inquiry into the topic's relevance to a faculty member's scholarship as well as create a shared exploration of the larger implications for humanities teaching and learning in a liberal arts context.

"The activities of the endowed NEH Fellows in the Humanities and the Humanities Institute will advance the college's mission of transformative liberal arts education," said President Jill Beck. "Those activities also will support several key objectives in the college's new 10-year strategic plan, including deepening and broadening the curriculum, enhancing faculty professional development programming and promoting cross-fertilization among disciplines.

"The NEH Humanities Institute will invigorate humanist discourse at Lawrence and stimulate greater integration of recent advances in the humanities into the scholarship and teaching of Lawrence's excellent tenure-line faculty," Beck added.

Established in 2005, the Lawrence Fellows program brings recent Ph.D. recipients to campus for two-year post-doctoral appointments. Each Fellow is mentored by a tenured faculty member, teaches a reduced course load and devotes significant time to developing their teaching and scholarly work. In any given year, Lawrence hosts 6-12 Fellows at a time across varied departments and interdisciplinary programs.

The Fellows program provides a successful transition from graduate school to life as a teacher-scholar in a liberal arts setting.

Although doctoral candidates at major universities receive some teaching experience, relatively few graduate programs offer strong training in course development or pedagogical skills suited for small college environments. Unlike teaching assistantships where course materials and procedures may already be set, new liberal arts faculty bear full responsibility for all aspects of the several courses they teach each year.

“Lawrence is an ideal environment for Fellows to develop as teacher-scholars,” said Beck. “The focus on individualized learning that characterizes Lawrence’s approach to educating students translates naturally to nurturing Fellows’ individual development. Small classes, a highly engaged intellectual climate, and a campus ethos that values collaboration over competition, combine to help Fellows hone pedagogical skills quite different from those typically called for at research universities.”

This is the third time Lawrence has been awarded an NEH Challenge Grant, which are highly coveted and extremely competitive. Just 22 Challenge Grants were awarded in 2011 out of 108 proposals from leading colleges, universities and museums of all sizes.

Lawrence successfully completed a Challenge Grant in the mid-1970s to renovate Main Hall and received a \$500,000 NEH Challenge Grant in 2001 to endow Freshman Studies, meeting the \$2 million matching obligation more than six months ahead of schedule.